

On the Importance of Personal Sources of Power in Politics

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Political actors derive influence both from their official position and from their own personal standing. However, political science has proven to be better equipped to study formal powers and institutions. The study of informal arrangements, where actors rely on personal connections and authority, is more challenging. This has arguably led to the predominance of an institutional focus in research. We argue for the study of informal sources of power as an equally important area of research. Drawing from historical and contemporary examples, we re-introduce the concepts of *auctoritas* and *potestas* to underline the difference between individual and institutional sources of influence. We discuss the various obstacles to measurement and outline attempts proposed to date in the literature.

Key words: *auctoritas*, *potestas*, institutions, personal sources of power, informal influence in politics

Introduction

If political science is the examination of the processes and structures that govern the redistribution of resources across a given political regime, clearly, such processes and structures include both formal and informal aspects. Because formal power relationships are observable and measurable in a way that informal power relationships are not, most of the existing research gravitates to the study of the former. For example, scholars study the relative influence and power of parliament versus cabinet, or of various cabinet posts within that cabinet, the duration in office of ministers, or the processes by which parliamentarians are elected, among many other similar inquiries. Scholars also study the differences in the institutional powers of prime ministers, presidents, or organizations, whether within or between countries. These studies tend to overlook the importance of informal power structures, personal relations and processes not measured by a purely institutional approach.

Consider an illustrating example from contemporary Polish politics. From 2015 Jaroslaw Kaczynski, the head of the *Law and Justice party (PiS)*, has been arguably as influential as, if not more than, the country's nominal political leaders — Prime Minister Beata Szydlo and President Andrzej Duda. This is because Kaczynski chose to neither run for the presidency nor to nominate himself as prime minister after his party won the 2015 legislative election. Instead, he decided to have his loyalists, Andrzej Duda and Beata Szydlo, be nominated for these posts. As a result, these two protégés assumed leadership posts nominally superior to that of their patron, a mere member of parliament. But the *de facto* power in Polish politics clearly remained with Kaczynski. Most expert observers and the public at large understand that from late 2015 Jaroslaw Kaczynski had been the *de facto* political leader in Poland. Kaczynski had usually been addressed “as ‘prezesie’, the Polish word for ‘chief’, instead of the customary ‘premierze’ — prime minister — the most senior title he has held”, with no important policies and decisions being made without his input (*Financial Times*, 2016). Because such power arrangement was apparently based largely on informal relationships, its subsequent study may be a task worthy of Sovietologists, in a sense that conclusions would have to be derived based on who was not clapping whom and why (e.g.,

Krzykowski, 2015). This mismatch in power between formal, nominal leadership positions and the real, *de facto* power-holders, has not only been challenging for scholars who study institutions but also for practitioners of politics. Jan Cienski wrote that the Polish power arrangement was particularly irksome in foreign affairs, especially for EU partners who met Polish political leaders in full knowledge that the latter did not make final decisions and that Kaczynski's approval was required (Cienski, 2016).

The mismatch between nominal leadership positions and the identities of *de facto* leaders underlines that there is more to political power than what is determined by the formal, institutionalized position. This is particularly striking at the level of national leadership. Kaczynski of Poland from 2015, Vladimir Putin of Russia from 2008--12, or Deng Xiaoping of China from 1978--89 are all examples of effective, *de facto* national leaders, who all occupied positions different from those occupied by the nominal leaders. Numerous examples also exist of individuals without any formal post who nevertheless are able to exert significant influence. In France during the Fourth Republic from 1946-58, Charles de Gaulle, who was out of power at the time, retained strong influence on politics through his control of the *Rassemblement du Peuple Français (RPF)* party, the network of supporters from the war period, and his personal standing as the "most illustrious Frenchman". Clearly, none from almost two dozens of prime ministers at the time was able to match de Gaulle in terms of his overall personal influence. Arguably, it is such personal sources of power that permitted de Gaulle to seize control of the government in 1958 (Hazareesingh, 2012) and thus turn his informal into formal power. The apparent dominance of some political actors over others with stronger formal powers is a phenomenon that can be found in both democracies and dictatorships. It can also be found at the levels of national political leadership and lower ranks in politics and civil service. These types of situations are challenging for scholars of politics, as researchers need to assess informal connections and sources of authority which are not explicitly defined by formal institutional structures.

There are competing, often epistemologically opposed perspectives on how to conceptualize and measure informal, personal, and non-institutional sources of power. In this prescriptive paper, we propose the ancient concepts of *auctoritas* and *potestas*, employed in antiquity to distinguish between the

personal standing and the powers of office (Mommsen, 1894). Focusing our discussion on the personal influence of an individual in a political system, we illustrate how these concepts may help us to understand the formal and informal sources of power in contemporary politics. We probe the relationship between *auctoritas* and *potestas* and discuss factors behind them. Next, we outline the various obstacles to measurement and outline approaches proposed in the literature. We conclude by arguing for political science to be more cognizant of informal sources of power of political actors.

Auctoritas and Potestas in politics

Political actors derive influence from their official position in the institutionalized structure, their office, but also from their own personal standing and individual attributes. Such actors implement various actions and policies that may affect their environment but in the analysis of impact on their environment it is always very difficult to distinguish “the person from the position which that person occupies” (Blondel 1987, 5). Leaving aside the question of the attribution of causal effects for the moment, we turn to what it means to differentiate the office from the person who occupies that office.

Consider the Russian presidency, the most powerful office in the country. According to law, the president possesses significant formal powers over hiring and firing of various officials, is in control of foreign, defense and security policy and has the authority to dissolve the legislature and dismiss the cabinet, among other things. Vladimir Putin, who occupied that office from 2000-2008, and then again, from 2012, was therefore the officeholder of the most powerful post in the country during these times. Because Article 81(3) of the Russian constitution bans presidential candidates from being re-elected for a third term consecutively, and perhaps following his own personal preferences at the time, Putin chose to step down from the presidency in 2008 and instead, from 2008-12, he served as prime minister, an office subordinate to that of the president. Despite this, during this time he undoubtedly remained the *de facto* political leader of the country (Baturo and Mikhaylov, 2014).

As prime minister, Putin had significant policy authority over social-economic development, and he also headed the ruling party, *United Russia*

(*Edinaya Rossiya*), with a constitutional majority in parliament. His own pre-eminence however stemmed not from the formal powers of prime ministerial office but rather from a multitude of informal sources of power, some only indirectly related to this post. First of all, a much better economy than in the 1990s, in combination with the regime's tight control of mass media, generated consistently high personal approval ratings for Vladimir Putin (Treisman, 2011). Many officials apparently came to believe that the president's influence transcended the powers of his office, i.e., that the country's success emanated not from the formal institutions of government but from the personal leadership of Putin. By this logic, Putin's own personal standing rather than the fact that he was the president, became paramount. In 2007, while Vladimir Putin was still in the presidential office but declared that he would not run for the third term in 2008, the speaker of the Russian parliament at the time, Boris Gryzlov, proposed to think of Putin not in terms of the office he occupied or would occupy, but as the "national leader": "Vladimir Putin will remain the national leader irrespective of the post he will occupy. ... such leader is, has to be, and will be Vladimir Putin. ... We will draw on every possibility to ensure that the country is continued to be led by Vladimir Putin" (*Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 2007). Secondly, Putin's political power also emanated from the fact that many influential officeholders in the cabinet, presidential administration, enforcement agencies and other institutions, including his successor President Medvedev, were appointed by and owed their elevation to Vladimir Putin personally (Baturu and Elkink, 2016). In other words, during the 2008-12 period, Putin's informal and personal sources of power were so dominant, that, in combination with his formal powers of prime minister, they apparently trumped the formally superior institutional powers of President Medvedev. Simply put, there was little doubt that Prime Minister Putin was more powerful than President Medvedev from 2008-12. Some observers even argued that, similarly to the Principate of Augustus --- which we discuss in the section below, Putin established the 'Principate of Putin' (*Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 2011).

The examples of Kaczynski in democratic Poland from 2015 and Vladimir Putin in authoritarian Russia from 2008-12 underline the point that formal powers of office are not always sufficient to explain the real distribution of power. Therefore, real-life political settings exist that may

necessitate observers to distinguish between informal and formal sources of personal power in order to make valid inferences and to avoid drawing incorrect conclusions based on the analysis of formal institutions alone. If this is the case, that informal aspects of power and influence are frequently important in politics, the question arises how we can conceptualize the difference between institutional and informal sources of power.

Rather than re-inventing the wheel, we propose to re-examine the ancient terms for formal and informal powers that we believe help to understand the relationship between these powers better. Specifically, we propose the terms of *auctoritas* and *potestas*. Below we discuss the origins and usage of these terms as practiced in history, before turning to the discussion of how they can assist in improving our understanding of contemporary politics better.

The ancients recognized that political influence can stem from both the power and prestige of the political office one occupied --- *potestas* or *imperium*, and also from the power and prestige of the particular individual holding it -- *auctoritas*. *Auctoritas* was understood as the individual clout and standing, ability to shape the agenda and ability to influence policies.¹ The term of *auctoritas* appears to originate with the authority of the Senate in contrast to the authority of the magistrates (Mommsen 1894, 330). Thus, *auctoritas* can both mean the individual authority (as opposed to the powers of office), and the senate's latent authority, the will of the senate's majority (Balsdon 1960, 43). Henceforth, we refer to *auctoritas* in its more general meaning, to denote individual authority.

In contrast, influence gained by the powers of office, the right to command, was referred to as *potestas* or *imperium*, granted to Roman officeholders. While *imperium* implied military command and was conferred on the top elected officials such as consuls, *potestas* implied legal powers and was applied to all civil officials. Thus, consuls had personal influence, *auctoritas*, before being elected, but they were granted *potestas* only after assuming office (Mommsen 1894, 1033-1044). Oftentimes, individuals with

¹ The modern English word of authority, while it is derived from *auctoritas*, unlike its Roman predecessor also encompasses the right to command, thus making it less distinguishable from *potestas* or *imperium*.

similar formal powers had significant disparity in overall influence because of differences in informal power and personal standing. Even though emperor Marcus Aurelius named his associate Lucius co-emperor with equal powers of *imperium*, they were not equal *de facto*. Since Marcus Aurelius had already shared imperial powers before, was older and more experienced, it was clear that he had more *auctoritas* --- an “intangible, but measurable factor in Roman public life” ... “He had been consul once more than Lucius, he had shared in Pius' administration, and he alone was Pontifex Maximus. It would have been clear to the public which emperor was the more senior” (Birley 2000, 117).

Consider the first Roman ruler of the Principate period, Octavian Augustus (27 BC-14 AD). During his long reign Augustus preserved the republican facade and occupied a plethora of formal, political offices (e.g., consul, proconsul) and even religious posts, as well as more informal roles (e.g., Father of the Nation) intermittently (Suetonius 1914, [c. 121 AD] Vol. I, Book II, LIII). Thus, Augustus retained annual consulship for five years into his tenure, relinquished it, only to occupy it again twice more later in his reign. He also held the powers, but not the official titles, of tribune and censor (Suetonius 1914, [c. 121 AD] Vol. I, Book II, XXVI). Even though Augustus did not institutionalize his authority as, for instance, perpetual dictator, his tacit pre-eminence was encapsulated by the new titles of *princeps* --- often reserved for the highest ranking senator, which now came to stand for, simply, the first citizen --- and, later in his reign, of Father of the Nation (ibid, LVIII). Augustus derived his superior status not from any particular office but from being himself, Augustus --- “Number One”. In fact, Octavian himself argued that he did not possess any more *potestas* than any other officeholders, he only had more *auctoritas* (personal influence) (Wirszubski 1950, 109-118). In his words:

For this service of mine I received the name of Augustus by decree of the senate, and the doorposts of my house were publicly decked with laurels, the civic crown was affixed over my doorway, and a golden shield was set up in the Julian senate house, which, as the inscription on this shield testifies, the Roman senate and people gave me in recognition of my valour, clemency, justice, and devotion. After that time I excelled all in authority, but I possessed no more power than the

others who were my colleagues in each magistracy (Augustus, *Res Gestae* 34 in Brunt and Moore 1969, 39).

The overall influence of Augustus --- the "foundation on which that influence rested," was "his command over several provinces and the legions stationed there, his incomparable financial resources, and a vast network of clients" (Eck 2003, 54). Furthermore, "the term *auctoritas* by itself sounds harmless enough, but one must not lose sight of what really counted, namely the sources of concrete power behind it" (Eck 2003, 54).

In later periods in history, in both contemporaneous writings and in later commentaries and analyses, a continuation of the distinction between the person and the office that person occupies can be found. The doctrine of the Catholic Church enforced strict distinction "between the charisma of office and the worthiness of the person" (Weber 1978, 1141) and "differentiated, as does every bureaucracy, between the office (*ex cathedra*) and the incumbent" (Weber 1978, 1140). This separation of a person occupying an office and function, office itself, thus allowed the church to disassociate itself from individual priests whose behavior could have stained its reputation. In the influential study of royal power in France and other Western European monarchies in the middle ages, Ernst Kantorowicz (2016 [1957]) discussed how medieval theologians and lawyers distinguished between two bodies of the king: the body natural, the mortal body of the royal person, and the body politic, the immortal, political body, i.e., the office of the king. The dual nature of the king, his personal attributes and the physical body on the one hand, as well as his sovereign body on the other, also explains the famous dictum, "*Le roi est mort, vive le roi* --- the king is dead, long live the king", proclaimed during royal succession (ibid., 409-19). How to separate the actions of the king as a person from those of his office was often complex. "The difficulties of defining the effects as exercised by the body politic --- active in the individual king ... --- on the royal body natural are obvious (ibid., p. 12); "it was difficult to establish a clear distinction 'between the will of the Crown and what the king wants' " (ibid., p. 18). Similar to political scientists of today who generally prioritise institutions over individual political actors, medieval jurists also assumed that body politic was more important than body natural (ibid., p. 18).

In summary, there exists a long tradition that conceptualises office and officeholder and distinguishes between the personal and institutional aspects of political influence. Similarly, in contemporary leadership literature there is a recognition that the so-called assigned leaders whose authority is based on "occupying a position in an organization" are not always able to become effective, real leaders, in contrast to individuals that are regarded as the most influential members of such organizations, "regardless of the individual's title" (Northouse 2009, 5-6). In contrast, Rose (1991, 10) underscores the influence of office in his study of prime ministers, which "exists independently of its transitory incumbents; it is there before a particular individual becomes prime minister and it will remain after the individual leaves." Curiously, academic political science has largely ignored the distinction, leaving the discussion of formal and informal powers of various political actors largely to the speculation of informed observers and the public.

(Re-)Introducing *Auctoritas* and *Potestas*

While we can certainly refer to institutional sources of influence as either formal powers, the influence of office, *ex cathedra*, even *body politic*, and to personal sources of influence as personal effects, or informal or individual influence, for the remainder of this article we use the terms of *potestas* and *auctoritas*. The reasons are twofold. First, we rely on the terms known in antiquity as a tribute to the first known usage of terms that are conceptually close to what we understand and discuss as formal and informal sources of personal power. Second, we turn to these terms to refer to the very specific aspects of power of individual political actors and in order to exclude other aspects that this article is not concerned with, such as the diffuse or discursive types of informal power that Lukes (2005) refers to as the third dimension of power (Swartz, 2005), or as informal institutions, unwritten socially accepted rules 'outside of officially sanctioned channels' (Helmke and Levitsky, 2004, 727). In other words, our focus is on personal sources of power, whether formal or informal, as opposed to institutions, whether formal or informal.

Specifically, we understand *auctoritas* to refer to the amount of informal influence a particular individual may have within a particular

political organization, regime, or political setting. In contrast, the influence of office refers to the formal powers that individual derives from his or her office, such as the power over hiring and firing of officials, over specific policy domains, the power to distribute various resources vested by the office. In this sense, the influence of office is very similar to the powers of *potestas* or *imperium* as the ancients understood them, while *auctoritas* is specific to a particular individual, to his or her personal background, traits, skills and personal connections.

The previously introduced examples of Kaczynski of Poland and Putin of Russia clearly illustrate the concepts of *auctoritas* and *potestas* between these politicians and their nominal superiors. Other examples from various countries, both historical and contemporary, abound. In Mexico from the late 1920s to around 1935 the national political boss, the head of the ruling party, *Jefe Máximo* Calles had been more powerful than official presidents of the country at the time, Portes Gil (1928-30), Ortiz (1930-32) and Rodríguez (1932-34) (Weldon 2007, 248–50). Calles had the ministerial portfolios of war and later industry, nominally subordinate to the president, but his real power rested on his record during the Mexican revolution, his relationship with the former president Obregon, his own record as a former president, and his reliance on the network of loyalists in key political posts. In other words, Calles had a significant degree of *auctoritas* that permitted him to dominate others with more powerful *potestas*. When President Cardenas came to power in 1934 and replaced Calles's supporters for his own lieutenants, *Jefe Máximo* lost his influence and departed from the scene. The cases of *prezesie* Kaczynski from 2015 or "national leader" and Putin from 2008-12 are similar situations to that of *Jefe Máximo* in Mexico in 1920-35. More extreme examples can be found at the national political leadership level. Indeed, some leaders possess so much *auctoritas*, that they maintain effective political leadership without holding a major political post at all. Rafael Trujillo (1930–61) of the Dominican Republic (who however remained the leader of the ruling Dominican party) and Anastasio Garcia Somoza of Nicaragua (1936–56) were both known to leave their presidential offices and rule their countries from behind the scenes. A similar phenomenon can be found in transitional democracies, such as in Georgia following the 2012 victory of the *Georgian Dream* coalition. Here

a billionaire and a politician, Bidzina Ivanishvili, quickly surrendered the office of prime minister to his former employees and business associates, Garibashvili in 2013 and then Kviriaashvili in 2015, while continuing to maintain effective control (*New York Times*, 2013).

While the examples illustrate how individuals with stronger *auctoritas* may dominant politics at the national level, examples from lower ranks equally exist. Earlier we referred to the example of de Gaulle's *auctoritas* in the mid-1950s. However, Jacques Foccart, President de Gaulle's *eminence grise*, provides an even better illustration of an individual in French politics with an enormous influence not warranted by the posts he held. From 1960 he served as the president's Chief Advisor on African Affairs --- the head of the so-called African cell in the presidential administration. He also oversaw the external intelligence in addition to being the co-founder of *Service d'Action Civique* (*Civic Action Service*), de Gaulle's personal paramilitary and secret service organization. During de Gaulle's tenure as president (1958-69), Foccart not only exerted more influence on foreign policy than the ministers of cooperation or even of foreign affairs at the time, but arguably he was also the second most powerful in the French politics overall (Verschave, 1999). Clearly, it was his political skills, patronage network, proximity and relationship to the president rather than his formal position than made him so powerful. Even after de Gaulle's departure in 1969, Foccart remained in politics under his successor, Pompidou, until 1974 (Péan, 1990).

Also, consider the office of the U.S. vice president that is granted very few powers by the constitution. Throughout its history this office has been overshadowed by other cabinet members and legislative leaders, it grew in importance under Walter Mondale in the late 1970s. However, it was Vice President Dick Cheney who, building on his lengthy political experience and close relationship with President Bush, came to exercise enormous influence. Likewise, Henry Kissinger had more influence as national security advisor than anyone in the same position (Mulcahi, 1986). The institutional powers of either role has not changed in recent times, yet the influence derived from these positions varies significantly between different office holders. Regardless of the legal or institutional arrangements for a particular office, some of the influence is clearly generated by the personality or personal background of the person in office. Indeed, the degree of influence over

domestic and foreign policy that Vice President Cheney wielded was due not only to the office that Cheney occupied but also to his own personal attributes, his lengthy political experience and close relationship with President Bush.

Likewise, consider a more recent example from the Trump administration. While the office of the attorney general is a very powerful institution in American politics, there are grounds to think that Jeff Sessions, appointed early in 2017, may be able to exert significantly more influence on policy-making than many other attorneys general since Robert Kennedy (1961-64), an attorney general who was also a brother of the president. As reported by interlocutors in several media reconstructions of the inner workings of the Trump administration, the previously relatively unknown Sessions apparently has strong influence on key members of the administration, such as senior advisor Kushner and chief strategist Bannon, who are admirers of Sessions (*The Washington Post*, 2017). Furthermore, Sessions also has several former associates in influential positions in the administration. His former chief of staff Dearborn is appointed as deputy chief of staff for legislative affairs; senior advisor Hamilton at the Department of Homeland Security had previously been Sessions' general counsel; and Miller, senior policy adviser, is another former staffer of Sessions (*CNN Politics*, 2017). In other words, at the time of this writing, Jeff Sessions appears to be very influential not because of his office alone but because of his own *auctoritas*.

Even at the local level this distinction between the formal and informal powers of an individual can be found. Hunter's famous study of power relations in a small community provides an illustrative example of *auctoritas*:

"Charles Homer is the biggest man in our crowd. He gets an idea. When he gets an idea, others will get the idea. ... Mr. Homer makes a brief talk; again, he does not need to talk long. He ends his talk by saying he believes in his proposition enough that he is willing to put ... his own money into it for the first year. He sits down. ... within thirty or forty minutes – we have pledges of the money we need. In three hours the whole thing is settled" (Hunter 1953, 173-4).

The exercise of authority without holding the top political post is not without consequences. For example in Russia, the fact that Vladimir Putin, despite his strong *auctoritas* during the “principat of Putin” still chose to return to the presidential office in 2012, indicates that holding the formal top office in the country with its *potestas* remains important, that relying on *auctoritas* alone may not be enough in the long run as the example of *Jefe Máximo* Calles illustrated. Furthermore, the focus on *potestas* and *auctoritas* of political leaders may enable us to understand more about the strength of institutions. In case of Kazcynski in Poland, the fact that a party leader can exert so much influence, or whether he would be able to continue to do so without assuming the post of prime minister later on, is not merely a curiosity of Polish politics or an inconvenience to its foreign partners. This mismatch also gives an indirect glance into the state of affairs in terms of political institutionalization, i.e., whether institutions are more important than political actors. In the final two sections of this paper we discuss the implications of *auctoritas* and *potestas* for regime dynamics, the problem of measurement of the concepts, as well as several caveats on how we can, or should, conceptualize these terms.

It is important to clarify the scope of our argument. The concepts of *auctoritas* and *potestas* strictly refer to individual, personal influence within a polity, or on policy-making within a political regime. Other forms of informal power that we exclude from the argument have certainly received significant attention in the literature already, often with entire subfields of study. For example, Marxist theory pays significant attention to the dominance of the interests of one economic class over the other --- an important aspect but conceptually distinct from *potestas* and *auctoritas* discussed herein. Similarly, gender theory is concerned with the informal, discursive, and diffused power that the society bestows on one gender relative to the other. Through socialization and internalization, these power relations become deeply embedded in society and affect human interactions throughout the system. Such power relations are entirely unrelated to specific institutional arrangements or offices and are in that sense informal. Lukes (2005) defines these as the third dimension of power, and distinguishes from the first dimension of decision-making powers and the second dimension of agenda-setting powers. This third dimension is “at a deeper, invisible level ...

consist[ing] of deeply rooted forms of political socialization where actors unwittingly follow the dictates of power even against their best interests” (Swartz, 2005). Our argument here is more restrictive in that we argue for the incorporation of personal characteristics such as standing, experience, or persuasive powers when trying to understand one’s personal, individual influence --- as opposed to that of particular groups, institutions, classes, or other substrata of society --- on political decision-making.

Accounting for Informal Personal Influence in Existing Research

There is a long tradition in the political science literature that argues that a political actor's power can be rooted either in the institutional structure and norms (in the office), or in personal qualities, or identity, of the officeholder. While scholars who examine institutions often rightly criticize, for instance, earlier studies for bringing personalities and idiosyncratic anecdotes to the fore (Edwards 1983, 100), to deny that individuals can transform offices they occupy can be equally misleading. Indeed, certain leaders possess special characteristics that others do not --- “oratorical skill, a genuinely new idea, or perhaps `charisma” (Ahlquist and Levi 2011, 6). Likewise, members of parliament that all occupy the same elected offices will differ in their degree of influence due to the differences in their background and experience, perceived career prospects, media exposure and powers of persuasion.

In his classic study of power relations, Max Weber (1978) distinguished between legal-rational authority whereby obedience to a power-holder rests on rational norms and where one's power is legitimate as long as it is aligned with these norms, so that “obedience is thus given to the norms rather than to the person” on the one hand and “personal authority” on the other, where authority can rest on either tradition --- rooted in personal loyalty to the person in power, --- or on a more elusive political charisma, where individual authority is based “neither upon rational rules nor upon tradition” but rather on followers' recognition of the personal mission of their leader (Weber 1978, 954, 1113). Political leadership can thus derive its authority from institutional, legal-rational norms (of office), or from personal factors (officeholder). Likewise, in the influential treatise on the American presidency, *Presidential Power*, Neustadt defines power as the “personal influence of an effective sort

on governmental action” (1990, ix) and distinguishes between three sources of power. First the formal powers vested by the constitution, second power coming from the professional reputation within Washington, and thirdly, “prestige, his public standing, amounting to impressions in the country generally about how well or badly he was doing as its President” (Neustadt 1990, 185). In France, it is such personal, non-institutional aspects of influence that made Charles de Gaulle the most powerful president since the establishment of the Fifth Republic, even though the constitutional powers of the presidency has not changed since.

Despite the importance of personal, non-institutional aspects of influence in politics, political science appears to be better equipped to examine formal powers and institutions. We examined the contents of abstracts of all articles in three premier journals in Political Science --- *American Political Science Review* (APSR), *American Journal of Political Science* (AJPS) and the *Journal of Politics* (JOP), as well as the premier journal in the comparative politics sub-field, *Comparative Political Studies* (CPS), for two years running from their first issue published in 2015, 581 articles altogether.² There are 103 articles published in APSR, 148 articles in AJPS, 196 in JOP, and 134 in CPS. Altogether, we count 218 articles, or 38 per cent, that are focused on formal institutions as either their dependent variable to be explained (e.g., turnout at elections, international agreement, electoral reform) or as the main explanatory variable, i.e., emphasized as the explanatory variable in the abstract, not merely as one of the control variables in the body of the paper. Of the four journals examined, AJPS, CPS and JOP published a higher percentage of “institutional” articles, 43, 40 and 38 per cent respectively, while we classify only 25 per cent in APSR as such.

What about informal and personal aspects of politics? As Helmke and Levitsky (2004, 726) pointed out, the subject of informal politics may covers an array of phenomena. We distinguish between several aspects. There are 25 articles in total, or 4.3 per cent, that arguably focus on personal aspects and

² We cover AJPS and JOP from January 2015 to January 2017 each, APSR from February 2015 to November 2016 and CPS from January 2015 to February 2017.

traits of political actors, such as personal traits and background of legislators, cabinet ministers and other politicians, as well as their career trajectories. For example, Carens and Lupu (2016) examined the effects of education of political actors at several levels of governance on performance in office and Alexiadou (2015) studied how background and careers of cabinet ministers influenced the direction of social welfare policy. In addition, there are 14 articles, or 2.4 per cent, that are focused on national political leaders but almost none of them account for personal and background traits of such leaders. Instead, oftentimes such studies examine the effects of leaders' death or leaving office on the outcomes of interests or the effects of institutions on leaders' behavior and fate. In other words, the articles on leaders are also "institutional" and include formal institutions as explanatory or outcomes variables. For example, Treisman (2015) examines the relationship between economic growth, leader's tenure, and the prospects for democracy, but leaders' individual traits are not included in the explanation. The relative paucity of attention to non-institutional sources of power is exemplified by the fact that there are only 23 articles, or 4 per cent, on the subject of outside influences on politics, such as on lobbying, money in politics, influence of trade unions and corporations on elections and elected officials (e.g., Mahoney and Baumgartner, 2015).

There is similar dearth of attention to the informal aspects of politics. There are only 22 articles, or 3.8 per cent, that focus on such informal aspects as those including informal governance, clans, factions and power brokers, patronage, and informal rules that underpin formal institutional arrangements. Skarbek (2016) is an example, studying the extent and form of informal inmate organization in prisons, while Xu and Yao (2016) examined informal institutions, rules, and norms in rural China. Pepinsky (2016) studied the effects of colonial networks of elite political and economic relations in Indonesia. Studies equally exist that highlight the importance of power relations within formal organizations, such as Kerevel (2015) who studied patronage relationships and the determinants of career trajectories of legislators in Mexico, or Dewan and Squintani (2016) who modeled party factions in the process of the development of an informed program of governance. Clearly, alongside informal aspects of politics, many of such

articles are also concerned with institutional aspects, such as how informal and formal institutions interact, or the sources of institutional change.

The Problem of Measurement

As we have outlined, although many authors in comparative politics have emphasized the importance of informal as well as formal powers, there continues to be a strong bias towards the latter in empirical research. We believe that this is primarily due not to the greater importance of formal structures, but to the challenges of measurement. Indeed, while such aspects of politics as, for example, tenure, formal powers, or parliamentary votes can be easily observed, in contrast, informal personal powers such as patronage relationships, personal standing, or dominance in interpersonal interactions cannot be directly observed, or at least not easily. In particular, in the more quantitative approaches to politics, this leads scholars to gravitate to and focus on institutions and formal posts, as evidenced in the previous section. Even when individual power is the topic of research, the investigation tends to evaluate the relative power of particular officeholders, as opposed to other influential individuals who may have significant influence over policy. For example, an investigation might evaluate the relative power of different prime ministers or presidents (such as in O'Malley, 2007; Doyle and Elgie, 2016). While such studies are very informative and provide important insights, they begin from the basic assumption that it is relevant to identify the important office first. In fact, a typical political science study will not necessarily encompass an evaluation of the relative powers of all relevant actors who exert influence on a country's domestic and foreign policy and who do not always occupy the highest political post, or indeed any post at all. Instead, such studies almost certainly will be restricted by design to the examination of the powers of office, i.e., *potestas*, or be restricted to evaluate overall influence of officeholders only. However, once we agree to a more plausible assumption that in many instances individuals exist who do not occupy significant political offices but who nevertheless possess significant *auctoritas* and who are able to influence politics as a result, the measurement of the distribution of power in a political system becomes more complex and it is not entirely clear how to conduct rigorous empirical research. For

instance, how can scholars account for the enormous influence on European or French politics of such individuals as Jean Monnet, who either held *ad hoc* appointments or occupied no posts at all and was never elected?

In order to differentiate between *potestas* and *auctoritas*, we ideally require three separate variables. First, we need a measure of the overall individual influence on policy or politics that can be attributable to a particular individual who is incumbent in his or her office or does not occupy any specific office but is nevertheless influential. Second, an indicator that gauges the institutional influence of a particular office irrespective of the officeholder, perhaps based on the constitutional powers, or a particular configuration of veto players, or perhaps as an average influence of that office, provided the sample is large enough. And third, we require an indicator of personal standing --- *auctoritas*, separately from the office.

This is certainly not an easy task. Consider a typical parliamentary cabinet where the prime minister is ranked as number one, finance minister -- number two, foreign minister -- number three, and so on. Schematically, we can assume that following election the leader of the successful party obtains the prime ministerial post, while the second-ranked individual takes the finance portfolio, and so on. From a practical standpoint, since more influential individuals assume more influential offices, the effects of office and that of officeholder will be strongly correlated. In addition, since leaders occupy offices in some predefined institutional structures, both their offices and the individuals holding them will be constrained, or empowered, by structural conditions or idiosyncratic events. It is therefore not surprising that the majority of studies concerned with measuring power focus on either overall personal influence, or formal powers, *potestas*.

How to assess the overall levels of political influence of an individual? Power is not only difficult to measure, but also not easy to define. This is partly because power is applied in a wide range of contexts, from relations between a few individuals, to the allocation of resources at the level of a polity, to the interaction between states in the international arena, but also because it can take the form of more abstract notions such as class relations or discursive power. As argued earlier, we limit the scope of the argument by focusing specifically on personal political power, i.e., the ability of an individual political actor to influence domestic and foreign policy. Such

personal political power certainly encompasses the components derived from the institutional position an individual political actor occupies --- *potestas*, and those derived from personal experience, standing, connections, charisma and skills --- *auctoritas*. While measurement of personal political power is difficult, there are notable political science studies that attempt to develop new methods to measure such power. These measures vary from those that are concerned with exclusively the more formal aspects of political power to those that attempt more comprehensive approaches.

The first type of measurements is concerned primarily with formal powers and look at the institutional arrangements. One might for example compare the British prime minister, the French president, and the president of the United States in terms of their relative abilities to influence domestic politics. In such studies, the focus is on the institutional powers attributed to different offices. The extensive literature on presidentialism, parliamentarism, and semi-presidentialism is a good example of such an approach (e.g., Elgie, 2004). In some very specific circumstances, it might be possible to have indicators of relative power that cannot easily be translated to other polities. For example, in the United States it might be possible to generate a relative ranking of political posts by the line of succession to the presidency, where the Vice-President is the first in line, the Speaker of the House of Representatives second, all the way down to the Secretary of Homeland Security at the fifteenth place.³ What these institutional measures have in common is that they are all by definition concerned with, and able to account for, *potestas* only.

The second type of measurements is related to the process of decision-making. These provide assessments of relative powers in the process of reaching a specific set of decisions. For instance, scholars may evaluate the relative negotiation powers of different actors. To do so, scholars compare the contents of the compromise decision that was reached as a result of the

³ Likewise, U.S. Congress maintains ranking on the basis of seniority (Goodwin, 1965), however this does not imply that more senior legislators are always more influential on policy-making as other determinants, such the relative strength of party factions, affinity to the executive, electoral performance or prospects, can factor in.

negotiation with observed preferences of actors prior to that negotiation. The relative similarity between a coalition government agreement and the original party manifestos of the coalition parties provides an example of such an approach (Benoit and Laver, 2003). An interesting example of a similar approach is the study of redacting in policy documents in the European Union, where the argument is made that the more a particular unit within the bureaucracy redacts a particular policy text, the more influential this unit is (Cross and Hermansson, 2017).

The third type of measurement focuses on the reputation of decision-makers. It assumes the most suitable method to capture not only formal and informal powers, but also latent powers,⁴ is the assessment of the reputation of political actors. Such studies may ask participants in the political process to evaluate each other's reputation. They utilise public opinion surveys that assess the reputation of individual politicians, especially in a local context, or experts' perceptions of reputation through expert surveys. A famous example of such an approach is Hunter's (1953) study of community power in a small town (called Regional City), where the relative power of individual members of the community are assessed through interviews with members of that community. Another, more recent example is Baturu and Elkink's (2014, 2016) study of political elites in Vladimir Putin's regime which used a unique monthly expert survey that assessed the relative influence on policy by the top 100 most influential individuals, regardless of their official position, over two decades.

Finally, instead of measuring power directly, scholars can also employ proxy variables that are expected to be correlated with power. For example, researchers may assume that public opinion support for presidents is a valid proxy for the likely overall power an individual president has within the system, so that the more popular presidents are assumed to be the more powerful. Particular institutional variables, such as cohabitation in semi-

⁴ Such as those of an actor who has the ability to influence the outcome but for whatever reason, e.g., because the outcome is already in the preferred direction, neglects to do so.

presidential regimes or the size of the majority in parliament in support of the political leaders, can similarly be used as proxies for individual power.

While the majority of the studies above all attempt to assess overall personal political power, either focusing on *potestas* alone or more broadly, there are few attempts to assess *auctoritas* separately. Baturo and Elkins (2014) offer a statistical method to distinguish between *auctoritas* and *potestas* using existing expert surveys that measure overall personal political power of individuals. The approach estimates *auctoritas* and *potestas* by leveraging information from observed changes in office for the same individual and from changes in the identity of officeholders for the same office. The assumption is that if on average each time different individuals who come to a particular office have their personal influence increased, that office is the likely source of influence, permitting to draw inferences about *potestas*. Similarly inferences about *auctoritas* are possible by observing changes (or the lack of change) in influence when the same individual occupies different offices. Other studies exist, such as the work by Fraga (2016) that attempts to separate the individual from context by disentangling the effects of political candidates from the effects of factors associated with the districts of these candidates.

In summary, the measurement of personal power in general and the separation in its *potestas* and *auctoritas* components is not only a considerable and exciting challenge in empirical research, it is also required if we are to truly understand political power relationships.

The Intertwined Nature of *Potestas* and *Auctoritas*

The relationship between *auctoritas* and *potestas* is obviously complicated. In this section we briefly discuss how *auctoritas* and *potestas* are intertwined in practice and how the relationship between the two may change depending on the context, on the parameters of a political regime and on its overall level of institutionalization.

The two sources of power and influence are closely related to each other. For instance, it is conceivable that a person may acquire *auctoritas* due to his or her *potestas*, or vice versa. Many of the individuals discussed throughout the paper and who came to dominate national politics because of their *auctoritas*, oftentimes derived such *auctoritas* from their prior serving in

the highest office, from their ability to install loyalists to important posts while serving in the highest office themselves. In this case holding *potestas* in the past permitted individuals to increase their *auctoritas*, whether as the former national security advisor Kissinger who emerged as the utmost foreign policy expert and authority, or Putin as Prime Minister who relied on his record and on the network of loyalists appointed while he was the president earlier. However, based on our reading and interpretation of the ancients, the amount of personal influence that an individual political actor possesses due to his prior career experience in politics can be understood as contemporaneous *auctoritas*, even though it is the experience of holding political offices in the past --- prior *potestas* --- that contributes to contemporaneous *auctoritas*, among other things.

What determines the informal component of personal influence that is conceptually separate from the powers of office is open to interpretation and is therefore challenging. As is clear from our discussion of the concept, *auctoritas* may include one's personality, e.g., oratorical skills, clientage and personal standing and reputation. Personal influence thus stems from one's background and inherent traits, and is largely time-invariant. However, one can reasonably argue that the number and influence of one's clients in important positions also determines one's personal *auctoritas*. The powers of patronage therefore belong to the informal component of personal influence, even if this is often achieved through the powers of appointment derived from *potestas*. The reverse, being a client of an influential patron, contributes to one's *auctoritas*, i.e., the position in the informal elite network around the leader affects one's personal influence. The precise separation of *auctoritas* and *potestas* here however depends on one's definition of institution, however. Stable informal patronage networks are, arguably, a form of institutional structure. It is therefore a modelling decision whether to understand *auctoritas* as the amount of individual personal influence determined by personal qualities such as education and skills alone, or by non-institutional sources of power that will certainly include patronage.

Researchers therefore need to be clear on the definition of institutions as rules since stable informal arrangements of the norms of behavior that may underpin formal institutions may also be conceptualized as institutions (Helmke and Levitsky, 2004). William Riker (1980) understood institutions as

broad rules of behavior concerned with decision-making. If a particular polity relies on informal patronage networks and on the norms of behavior determined by such networks, rather than on formal institutions, then there may be a necessity to reconceptualise what we understand by *potestas* and *auctoritas*. Eleanor Ostrom (1986) argued that the fusion of informal practices and formal institutional rules may lead to the reliance on the so-called “rules-in-use” that lead to complex situations when formal and informal rules overlap.

The relationship between institutional hierarchy and informal hierarchy is also dynamic. Consider the hypothetical situation when the top effective leader, No 1, occupies the nominal formal post No 2. Provided the time he or she occupies is long enough, in all likelihood the formal perceived hierarchy of offices will change, and the previously perceived No 2 office will become the No 1, so that the mismatch is no longer. Over time, provided the pre-eminent official with *auctoritas* continues to occupy the position with lower *potestas*, such position may become dominant instead, such as that of *Shogun* over emperors in medieval and modern Japan. Even though the emperor formally appointed *Shogun*, the latter had the real, *de facto* power in the country. Over time, the office of *Shogun* became hereditary and the focal point for the system of government in the country, *Shogun's* regime (Mass and Hauser, 1985). In other words, the office of *Shogun* arguably moved to become the top position with the highest *potestas*.

How to define the hierarchy of offices and formal rules in place may be a modelling decision. After October 1917 in Russia, Vladimir Lenin, the leader of the revolution, took up the post of the Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars, i.e., the head of government (Sebestyen 2017, 346). Continuing with the application of *auctoritas* and *potestas*, Lenin possessed the strongest *auctoritas* but also *potestas* inside the Soviet regime at the time. As Lenin's health deteriorated however, Stalin who was able to assemble the strongest network of supporters from his previously inconsequential office of the general secretary of the party, was able to sideline rivals and to emerge as the leader after Lenin's death. As a result, the office of the general secretary became the strongest political office in the country and remained so until the collapse of the Soviet Union. In turn, the office of the head of government that was No 1 under Lenin, became subordinate to the now new No 1 office, that

of the general secretary. In other words, in the context of post-Lenin Soviet politics, we cannot argue that the office of the general secretary had lower *potestas* than that of the head of government so that the leader who occupied the post of the general secretary dominated merely because of his *auctoritas*. An analyst may need to consider institutions in context, in the perspective of Soviet politics, and to recognize that the office of the general secretary was *formally* powerful because it was the top position in a single-party regime where party dictated all national policy. Formally, the top leadership position was the Collective Presidium of the Supreme Soviet, a “rubber stamp” body, which was also weaker than the general secretary or the chairman of the council of commissars (or later ministers) (Zimmerman, 2014). It is therefore erroneous to argue that the presidium had more *potestas* than the general secretary.

Situations are common in military regimes where the military authorities, *de facto* leaders of the country, may retain, or tolerate, civilian leadership that constitutionally holds powers over the military but in reality is powerless. For example, in Panama in 1972-81 and later in 1983-89 the military leaders acquired the titles of Maximum Leader of National Liberation, e.g., Omar Torrijos (1972-81); Manuel Noriega (1983-89), and dominated the civil presidents at the time. Obviously, the military leaders dominated the office of the president not because of their stronger *auctoritas* but because in the context of the military regime their position was dominant, i.e., had much stronger *potestas* (or perhaps, continuing with the usage of terms from antiquity, *imperium* --- military command).

In another party-based regime, the People’s Republic of China, following the death of the national leader and the general secretary of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Mao Zedong, Deng Xiaoping (1978-89) who emerged as the new leader of the regime, came to occupy the subordinate posts of the Vice-Chairman of the Central Committee (1977-82), Vice Premier (1977-80), Chairman of the Central Military Commission (1981-89), formally outranked by others, e.g., Premier Zhao (1980-87) or General Secretary of the CPC Hu Yaobang (1982-87). However, neither of his posts became synonymous with the *de facto* leadership post for his political successors as had Stalin’s party secretary’s post. Instead, Deng’s successors returned to occupy the office of the general secretary of CPC that since Mao has been the

place for the paramount leadership in the country. Deng Xiaoping therefore arguably possessed strong *auctoritas* that permitted him to dominate those with stronger *potestas*.

Provided the most powerful individual occupies no formal position, he or she himself arguably becomes a quasi-institution, invariably leading to overall political deinstitutionalization. For example, when Muammar Gaddafi (1969-2011) of Libya relinquished his Chairmanship of the Revolutionary Council in 1979 and instead assumed the ceremonial post Brotherly Leader and Guide of the Revolution, the office and the officeholder at the national level became indistinguishable while the offices of the Secretary-General of the General People's Congress or General Secretary of the General People's Committee were nominal and weak during Gaddafi's rule.

Furthermore, the analysis of the relative influence of *auctoritas* and *potestas* is not only informative for understanding power relations at a particular level of politics but may also have implications for understanding regime dynamics overall, at the aggregate level. When the effective political leader in a country does not occupy the top nominal political post, it may suggest that a valid cause for concern exists over possible deinstitutionalization. But it is possible that the mismatch is only present at the level of national political leadership. When the mismatch is present at all levels of government, it gives a clear indication that the regime is significantly deinstitutionalized (Baturu and Elkink, 2014).

Conclusions

The separation of personal influence on policy-making in a political regime into its institutional and individual sources is a significant challenge. It is difficult to achieve not only conceptually due to the interconnected nature of the two aspects, but also empirically, due to the significant challenges in measuring power in general and separating the two aspects in research design. Nevertheless, we argue that research that focuses exclusively on formal and institutional power relations runs the risk of missing key dynamics of political regimes, and in some cases even overlooks the key powerholders and key causes of various policies and outcomes. Comparativists rightly focus on institutions in their studies of advanced

consolidated democracies such as France or the United States where there is a high degree of “institutional routinization” and where individuals comply with institutional rules so that the latter largely determine their overall political influence (Linz and Stepan, 1996, 10). However, as the above mentioned examples from French politics of de Gaulle and his lieutenant, Foccart, as well as from US politics in relation to individuals in the Trump administration suggest, when democratic politics is in flux and important political actors either do not comply with norms or are able to exert influence not warranted by their institutional position, we need to account for *auctoritas* in order to understand real-life politics fully.

The examination of formal institutional or constitutional aspects may provide great insights into our understanding of democracies and dictatorships and in particular the grey area in between. However, such an approach can also miss the actual transition or distribution of power in a system, as the examples of Kaczynski’s Poland and Putin’s Russia clearly illustrate. Therefore, the empirical evaluation of both *auctoritas* and *potestas* of key officeholders and influential actors without office is of crucial importance, particularly in the comparative analysis of illiberal democracies or electoral autocracies.

We believe that a new research agenda that takes into account the need to measure personal sources of power and to understand how such informal aspects and relationships impact on the evolution of political regimes is urgently overdue (also see Helmke and Levitsky, 2004). We also think that the proposed re-introduction of the old concepts of *auctoritas* and *potestas* into the study of politics may significantly improve significantly our intuitive understanding of real-life politics and specific situations that are not easily amenable to formal institutional analyses.

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